

# A STANDARD SWAHILI-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

(FOUNDED ON  
MADAN'S SWAHILI-ENGLISH DICTIONARY)

*By the former*  
**INTER-TERRITORIAL LANGUAGE COMMITTEE  
FOR THE EAST AFRICAN DEPENDENCIES**  
*under the direction of*  
**THE LATE FREDERICK JOHNSON**

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford New York Toronto  
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi  
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo  
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town  
Melbourne Auckland  
and associated companies in  
Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

Published in the United States  
by Oxford University Press, New York

ISBN 0 19 864403 5

First edition 1939

Reprinted 1942, 1945, 1948, 1951,  
1955, 1959, 1963, 1964, 1967,  
1969, 1970 (twice), 1971 (twice), 1973,  
1974, 1975, 1976, 1977 (twice),  
1978, 1985, 1986, 1990

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without  
the prior permission of Oxford University Press

Published with the authority of the  
Inter-territorial Language (Swahili)  
Committee to the East African Dependencies

B. J. Ratcliff  
Secretary, I.L.C.

Printed in Great Britain by  
Antony Rowe Ltd,  
Chippenham

FOREWORD

By THE BISHOP OF ZANZIBAR

of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa

The publication of a Standard Dictionary is always a landmark in the history of a language.

The Universities' Mission to Central Africa has been allowed to have an important share in the discovery and elucidation of the Swahili language, and in this connexion the names of Steere and Madan can never be forgotten. They were not merely pioneers but scholars, and this fact has given a lasting permanence to their labours.

Since the days of these two men, however, time has brought many changes together with increased knowledge, and an inspection of this new work will quickly prove how necessary was the present revision and how profitable it is bound to be. It is a matter of good fortune that the revision of these two dictionaries was placed in the capable hands of the late Frederick Johnson, formerly Secretary of the Inter-territorial Language (Swahili) Committee, which has done so much to standardize the language and to preserve its orthography from confusion.

It is surely the duty of every one living in a new country to gain as far as possible an adequate and correct knowledge of its language, and this duty belongs not merely to Government officials and members of Missions who are obliged to pass examinations in order to qualify for their work, but also to all who are engaged in commerce, agriculture, and other pursuits, for without such knowledge there can be no mutual understanding which is both necessary for our own success, as well as for the uplift of the people of the country, in which we should all claim to have a share.

This conspectus of the Swahili language will therefore help us all to find that the language is more worthy of our serious study than perhaps we had previously considered.

✠ THOMAS ZANZIBAR

May 1939



## ABBREVIATIONS

EASILY recognized abbreviations are used for the common grammatical names of parts of speech and their varieties—conjugation, moods, tenses, &c.

The principal forms of the verb-stem are distinguished as *Cs.* Causative, *Cv.* Conversive (formerly called Reversible), *Deriv.* Derived, *Dir.* Direct, *Dur.* Durative, *Inf.* Infinitive, *Inten.* Intensive, *Pot.* Potential, *Prep.* Prepositional (formerly called Applied), *Rd.* Reduplicated, *Rf.* Reflexive, *Rp.* Reciprocal, *St.* Stative (formerly called Neuter), *Stc.* Static, *Ten.* Tenacious. Note: *D.* is prefixed before an abbreviation to indicate that the form is doubled, e.g. *D.Prep.* means double prepositional form, or prepositional form of a prepositional form.

*Ps.* denotes Passive, *Act.* Active, *Pos.* Positive, *Neg.* Negative, *Trans.* Transitive, *Intrans.* Intransitive.

*Pfx.* Prefix includes (for convenience) infix, suffix, and affix—the same formative element being often medial or final as well as initial.

The chief languages referred to are: *Ar.* Arabic, *Hind.* Hindi, *Pers.* Persian, *Turk.* Turkish, *Eng.* English, *Port.* Portuguese.

The following may also be noted:

a. = adjective.	loc. = locative.
adv. = adverb.	n. = noun.
amplic. = ampliative.	obs. = observe.
comp. = compound.	opp. = opposed to, of opposite meaning.
conj. = conjunction.	perh. = perhaps.
conj. = conjugation.	pers. = personal, person.
cf. = compare.	prec. = a word or article immediately preceding.
conn. = connect, connected.	prep. = preposition.
contr. = contrast, contrary in meaning.	prob. = probably.
dem. = demonstrative.	pron. = pronoun.
dim. = diminutive.	pronom. = pronominal.
dist. = distinguish, distinct in meaning.	prov. = proverb.
esp. = especially.	rel. = relative.
fig. = figurative, in a figurative sense.	syn. = synonymous, in a wide sense, illustrative of the general, or of a special, meaning of a word.
folg. = a word or article immediately following.	transp. = transposition.
imp. = imperative.	usu. = usual, usually.
int. = interjection.	v. = verb.
interrog. = interrogative.	
lit. = literally, in a literal sense.	

## A SWAHILI-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

(Words marked \* appear not to be of Bantu origin).

### A

**A** represents the sound of *a* in 'far', or of *a* in 'pat' when short.

**Al A-aa! A-h! Aha! A-haa!** int. of wonder, pleasure, pain, acquiescence, dissent, &c., according to the mode of expression, intonation, and the length of the vowel.

**Aali,\*** a. good, superior, first rate. *Kitu hiki ni aali*, this thing is very good, only used of things, and then seldom. (Cf. *bora*, *teule*. Ar. اعال.)

**Aasi,\*** v. See *Asi*.

**Abadan,\*** adv. used only with negatives, never, e.g. *sitakuja kwako abadan*, I shall never come to your place. (Cf. *hamue*.) **Abadi**, adv. ever, always, constantly, *kazi yake ni kuiba abadi*, he is always stealing. (Cf. *daima*, *sikuzote*, *kila mara*, *milele*. Ar. ابد.)

**Abd.\*** See under *Abudu*.

**Abedari,\*** n. a large block or pulley, used in dhows. (Cf. *henza*, *kapi*, *gofa*, *roda*, *korodani*. ? corruption of Port. *aberdanas*, small ropes to make firm the lines of the shrouds.)

**Abedari!** int. See *Habedari*.

**Abiriri,\*** v. pass over, cross over, i.e. a river, lake, sea, but also used for travel as a passenger by any kind of conveyance, e.g. ship, railway, motor-car, aeroplane, &c. **Prep.** **Abiria**, *Cs.* **Abirisha**, put across, ferry over, convey as a passenger, &c. **Abiria**, n. a passenger. *Meli ya abiria*, a passenger steamer. *Gari la abiria*, a passenger train, as opp. to *gari la bidhaa* (or *mizigo*), a goods train. *Motakaa ya abiria*, a taxi. (Cf. *vuka*, *safiri*. Ar. ابر.)

**Abudu,\*** v. serve, worship, adore, used only of religious worship and service. *Abudu Mungu*, serve or

worship God. *Abudu sanamu*, worship idols. **Prep.** **Abudia**, give worship to, worship in (for, on account of, &c.). *Njia ya kumwabudia Mungu*, the way, manner, &c., of worshipping God. *Cs.* **Abudisha**, cause to worship, teach how to worship, &c. **Abd**, n. servant, slave, but only used in such names as *Abdallah*, *Abdulrahamani*, &c. **Ibada**, n. (1) worship, divine service; (2) regular service, habit, characteristics, e.g. *amefanya mabaya kuwa ibada yake*, he always does evil. **Maa-badi**, n. a place of worship. **Maabudu**, n. (1) worship; (2) object of worship. **Mwabudu**, n. wa- a worshipper. (Cf. *abadi*, *tumika*, *sujudu*, *dini*, and *tabia*, *kazi*, *mazoea*. Ar. اعد.)

**Abunuwas,\*** n. the name in stories of Arabic origin, of the character who invariably comes off best owing to his shrewdness like the *sungura* (hare) in stories of African origin.

**Acha**, v. the main idea is, ceasing or breaking off connexion with something, and may be rendered in many ways, with many shades of meaning, e.g. (1) leave, leave off, leave behind, let go, let pass, let be, go (part, depart) from, e.g. *acha kufanya upusi*, leave off doing foolish things. *Siku-achi*, I will not let you go. *Tuliacha vitu vingi*, we left behind many things. (2) abandon, neglect, desert, e.g. *kuku amewaacha watoto wake*, the hen has deserted (or neglected) her chicks. (3) acquit, release, pardon, e.g. *alikamata muisi akamwacha*, he caught a thief and then released him, let him go. *Acha mumu huru*, let a slave go free (set him at liberty). (4) allow, permit, give leave, e.g. *watu wengine huwacha watoto wao wafanya wapendavyo*,